



TITLE:

<Book Reviews> Tai Lands and Thailand:
Community and State in Southeast Asia
ANDREW WALKER, ed. Honolulu: University
of Hawai'i Press, 2009, 261p.

AUTHOR(S):

Baba, Yuji

CITATION:

Baba, Yuji. <Book Reviews> Tai Lands and Thailand: Community and State in Southeast Asia ANDREW WALKER, ed.
Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009, 261p.. Southeast Asian Studies 2013, 2(1): 199-204

ISSUE DATE:

2013-04

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/173777>

RIGHT:

ghost who died during childbirth, frightened and annoyed the villagers, but was finally appeased by a celebrated monk from Bangkok. While this can ostensibly be interpreted as a story of control over a spirit cult by Buddhism, or the Buddhacization of rural spirit cults at a time when Thailand was modernizing, we can also see this ghost story as a case of “inspiring Buddhism.” Nowadays the female ghost is enshrined within the temple of the village and attracts many worshippers praying for an easy delivery or simply for a good luck. Though the ghost had been suppressed by Buddhism, Nang Nak seems to survive and conversely to support and strengthen Buddhism by occupying a corner of the temple. Despite the differences of historical process between Laos and Thailand, “inspiring Buddhism” can be used not only for the case of Laos but also for other situations.

One flaw of this volume is that it does not give accounts of religious reality in rural Lao that are based on the author’s own research. Except for chapter 4, which elaborates on novices’ views on religious life and two annual rituals, other chapters lack descriptions of the situation in rural villages, where the author stresses the importance of the substratum of the religion. Moreover, the spirit veneration mentioned in this book is too exclusively limited to types of guardian deities. A consideration of other kinds of spirits, such as *phi pop* or *phi phrai*, which are usually classified as evil spirits, would have enriched the analysis of the village situation. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, Holt’s approach to spirit veneration has the potential to shed light on the under-explored and overlooked aspects of religious life in Southeast Asia.

Tsumura Fumihiko 津村文彦

Center for Arts and Sciences, Fukui Prefectural University

References

- Hayashi, Yukio. 2003. *Practical Buddhism among the Thai-Lao: Religion in the Making of a Region*. Kyoto: Kyoto University Press.
- Tambiah, Stanley J. 1970. *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults of Northeast Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tiyavanich, Kamala. 1997. *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-century Thailand*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

Tai Lands and Thailand: Community and State in Southeast Asia

ANDREW WALKER, ed.

Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009, 261p.

In the current period of intensified globalization, reconstructing community is one of the most

important issues for the study of society in the modern world. Andrew Walker's most recent edited publication argues this through reviewing the ideal of community, which has been critically discussed among Thai intellectuals, and examines the reality of communities that exist in the Tai Land or the Tai world, beyond Thailand itself.

As summarized on the back cover, this book aims to provide an alternative view of the rapid social and economic changes taking place in the Tai world that differs from the conventional discussion about community, which concludes that the traditional community is undermined "by the modern forces of state incorporation and market penetration." The authors describe modern forms of community, which they refer to as "modern Tai community" or "modern community," emphasizing how state power intersects with the market, livelihoods, and aspirations, using both thematic and ethnographic studies from Thailand, Laos, Burma, and southern China.

Within an anthropological framework, the editor, Walker, connects ethnographic data gathered in the Tai world, and conducts a theoretical review of Tai community and the political situation in Thailand. This publication, as such, offers a timely, stimulating, and unique study on the theme of community.

In pursuing this theme, the writers in this volume criticize concepts deployed by Thai intellectuals such as "community culture," because the school that employs this concept has insisted on the importance of community against state power and market economy threats, and tried to find authentic Tai communities outside Thailand.

In Chapter 2, Reynolds examines the development of the Tai concept of *chumchon* (community) and lucidly demonstrates how it is a comparatively new term, appearing in Sarit's policy of *Pattana Chumchon* (Community Development) in the 1950s. The idea of "community culture" (*wattanatham chumchon*) appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and has been embraced by public intellectuals, academics working in development, and NGOs. The meaning of community (*chumchon*) is shown to be an alternative to "modernity," which was against state policy for development in Sarit's period, during the 1950s and 1960s.

As such, ethnographic data in this book describes communities as been created by negotiation with market economy and state power, and not in juxtaposition to the threat they offered. In Chapter 3, Haughton mentions that the community culture vision of local communities that operate within a moral, rather than self-interested economy (a self-sufficient one) is unrealistic and historically false. He reports cases of community organizations such as a rice bank in a village in Roi Et province of Northeastern Thailand which tries maintain itself by gaining profits through negotiation with the market economy. What Haughton shows is that traditional modes of behavior have already been systematically refashioned to fit the imperatives of the capitalist economy. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 report on communities which are formed through negotiations with state power.

In Chapter 7, Singh describes the dormitory community whereby low-ranking forestry officials reside together, concluding that "recognition of these modern bureaucratic communities challenges

simplified state-society dichotomies” (p. 165). In Chapter 8, Mayes reports on marginalized groups that are seeking forms of belonging which have been denied to them in the official imagery of the nation-state.

The case of Tai Lue in Sipsong Panna, Yunnan which Dianna describes in Chapter 9, reveals that the orientation of Dai youth within a new political and economic context of globalization is informed more by a sense of belonging to a modern Chinese national community than by a sense of transnational ethnic commonality. As such, Chapters 4 and 9 refer to trans-national communities in the Tai world.

The Tai Study Project is rooted in the school of community culture and has accorded attention to the Tai community outside Thailand by seeking authentic communities as a model of collective, harmonious, and primordial life. However, the Project ignores the reality of the Tai world. In Chapter 4, Farrelly criticizes the notion of “community culture” and states that “the authentic communities prescribed in Thai interpretations do not help to legitimize Shan claims for work, citizenship and human rights precisely because so much effort has been devoted to rediscovering an essence of T(h)ai-ness for the Thai” (p. 85).

In Chapter 9, Dianna mentions that many scholars propose that the increase in cross-border movement and exchange since the 1990s has enabled the Lue to develop creative ways to bypass state nationalist practice and discourses and to revitalize an imagined pan-Tai community united by a sentiment of “shared ethnic oppression” (p. 206). This privileging of the transnational over the national ignores the quotidian engagement with the nation that marks Tai Lue people’s lives in China.

What both the cases of Tai Lue and Shan show is that past arguments have tended to pay attention to an imagined ideal, but to the detriment of the actualities of complicated political and economic situations and their day-to-day lives in cross-border areas.

In this book, “modern Tai community” is described with particular reference to the “symbolic construction of community” (Anthony Cohen’s term) and “realizing community” (Vered Amit’s term) — community realized through a pattern of day-to-day interaction and communication (Cohen 1985; Amit 2002).

Yet, the chapters in this book explore the symbolic and social construction of community in the context of modern society in three different ways, and they are divided into three parts along these lines. The first part (Chapters 2–4), *Critical Engagement*, argues that the common imagery of Tai community (*chumchon*) can be seen as a form of contemporary symbolic simplification; the second (Chapters 5–6), *Local Network*, focuses on the dynamics of “doing community” in a local ritual context; and the final part (Chapters 7–9), *Negotiated States*, focuses on community being created as a result of dialogue with state power.

The image of “Community,” particularly of “community culture” described in the first part, is a selective and simplified imagery of traditional communal livelihood and is described as “a

boundary-making symbol—it sets them off from what they see as an undesirable mainstream preoccupation with national integration, economic development and rampant consumerism” (p. 22).

Yet, contrary to this, many chapters, especially in the second part, dwell on contemporary communities which are not territorially bounded units.

For example, as the editor points out, spirit propitiation and Buddhist ceremonies are often associated with stereotypical images of Tai communities, but Chapters 5 and 6 propose that forms of communities that are created are partial, personal, idiosyncratic, and often extra-local in orientation (p. 23).

In Chapter 6, the editor, Walker, demonstrates that symbolic simplification lies at the heart of the creation of community but village solidarity disaggregates into unbounded networks of personalized practice. He points out that recognizing this complexity does not eliminate the importance of a sense of belonging, but it does encourage greater attention to the ongoing project of community creation. Therefore it can be said that “community comes to be seen as a work in progress” (p. 23). Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the dynamics of this process, which is called “doing community.”

As the editor states, the sentiment of community often focuses on cultural and social components that do not necessarily serve boundary-making functions. The key components can often be seen as a symbol for creating a sense of belonging in the community which is not a bounded unit. Examples are described both in part two and part three. The offering of the Puta spirit ritual (Chapter 5) and scooter (Chapter 8) are symbolic goods for creating a sense of belonging; “Suan huam” (common or collective) which denote a morally desirable domain of common endeavor (Chapter 6) and “Suzhi” (human quality) in the agenda of modern China (Chapter 9) are symbolic morals for creating a sense of belonging. However, the editor points out that there are risks in overstating the symbolic dimensions of community, so the ways in which symbols gain salience through forms of day-to-day social interaction need to be spelled out.

The main theme of the chapters in part three is community formation as the result of negotiating with the state. These examples are also salient in the process of “doing community” as the editor explains that “they often intersect creatively with individual aspirations for prosperity, education, mobility and security. New modes of communal belonging are framed at these modern intersections between official policy and personal orientation” (p. 23).

Dormitory community (Chapter 7) and Puta ritual community (Chapter 5) are good examples of such new modes of communal belonging. These communities are based on this personal orientation which has an unbounded network that intersects with the artificial community created by the Lao government for development as a bounded territorial unit.

The last chapter, by Walker, focuses especially on the retirement drama of ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and concludes the discussion of communities in the Tai world. Walker shows how voters agree with Thaksin’s vision of market-oriented economic diversity, thereby revealing

that both state and market economy are inseparable from community and that Thai intellectuals have committed the error of putting ideals before reality. Thai intellectuals have also been mistaken in insisting that the ideal of a local Tai community that stretches across borders ignores people's grounded realities as seen in both the Shan and Tai Lue cases. Walker states that the present-day Tai communities challenge the framework that is preoccupied with the rise and fall of traditional Tai communities. It is clear that Walker takes up Thaksin's drama to reveal an intellectual misunderstanding.

However this book does not only criticize the factitious elements of Thai intellectuals' ideas represented in "Community culture" but also affirms its strategic effect. "Modern community" warns that overstating this strategic effect might lead to the suppression of reality.

In Chapter 10, Walker mentions that "our concept of 'modern Tai community' represents an alternative framework for both analysis and empowerment. It points to the diverse ways in which people create new means of belonging in contexts of social transformation" (p. 220). Although the vision for empowerment is not clearly shown, the need of community to maintain the commons is suggested based on reality as mentioned in Chapter 3: "communities may also be recursively defined and created by reference to their commons rather than to the increasingly anachronistic 'traditions' which the rural people of Thailand are leaving behind, along with the NGOs that cling to them" (p. 65).

Houghton argues for contemporary "communities of common interest" based on achieving access to affordable capital or the shared experience of urban employment (Chapter 3). This concept redefines traditional community as only limited to natural resources. It is a key point of strategic aspect of "modern Tai community."

"Modern Tai community" is not a bounded territorial unit but rather an unbounded network that has communal sentiment, which is not opposed to state power and market economy. The editor summarizes that "there is a risk that moralistic exhortations about the importance of village solidarity will overlook the extent to which livelihood security is achieved via personalized and dispersed networks of family, friends and kin" (p. 220). It has been pointed out in the Southeast Asian studies that the organizational principle of Southeast Asian society is not the "group" but, rather, the "network" (e.g. Tsubouchi and Maeda 1977). How is this related to the concept of a "modern Tai community"? As a conceptual framework, how might it be effective in modern Southeast Asian Societies? It might be said that it is rather easier for Tai society to adapt to an unstable modern society by creating a "modern community" as an unbounded network.

A final departure point may be to clarify the concept of "modern Tai community" in order to answer some of the questions raised in this thought-provoking volume.

Baba Yuji 馬場雄司

Faculty of Social Relations, Kyoto Bunkyo University

References

- Amit, Vered, ed. 2002. *Realizing Community: Concepts, Social Relationships and Sentiment*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, Anthony. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London: Tavistock.
- Tsubouchi Yoshihiro; and Maeda Narifumi 坪内良博, 前田成文. 1977. *Kakukazoku Saiko* 核家族再考 [Rethinking the nuclear family]. Tokyo: Kobundo.

Merchants of Madness: The Methamphetamine Explosion in the Golden Triangle

BERTIL LINTNER and MICHAEL BLACK

Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009, xii + 180p.

In recent years, amphetamine type substances (ATS) have become the most widely used illegal narcotic drugs in Mainland Southeast Asia. These substances contain the medicinal alkaloid ephedrine which is amply found in Asiatic species of the Ephedra Family. Ephedra is known in Chinese as *ma huang* (麻黄), “Yellow Cannabis.” The plants themselves are mostly deciduous shrubs growing in arid areas in the middle and north of China and points westward.

As Bertil Lintner and Michael Black show clearly in *Merchants of Madness*, production and use of ATS in the region has exploded in recent years, far surpassing the total number of opiate users. Because ATS in this region is essentially a local phenomena with little exported to Europe or North America, much less is known about it outside Southeast Asia.

However, within Thailand and Burma as well as its neighbors, ATS has become a serious problem. As long ago as 1996, UNDCP officials (the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, forerunner of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC) were becoming aware that ATS production in the region was accelerating even as opium poppy cultivation and use was stagnating if not actually declining. In its 2010 *Situation Assessment on Amphetamine-Type Stimulants* (UNODC Global SMART Programme 2010), UNODC noted that 50–80 percent of the world’s ATS users are in East and Southeast Asia, that almost 100 million tablets were seized in 2009, and that production is increasing mostly in border areas in North and East Shan State.

As with opium, ephedrine has both positive and negative properties. It stimulates the brain, increases the heart rate, and expands the bronchial tubes. It also increases the metabolism. Ephedrine has long been used in China to treat asthma and other ailments. In the United States ephedrine is the active ingredient in pharmaceutical preparations such as Benzedrine which was an inhalant for the treatment of asthma. However, when it was learned that ephedrine had a euphoric effect, people began removing the paper strip inside the inhaler and swallowed it. “Bennies” grew so popular that Ian Fleming had 007 using them in three of his novels. There are